

CALIFORNIA WILDLIFE HABITAT RELATIONSHIPS SYSTEM
maintained by the
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
and supported by the
CALIFORNIA INTERAGENCY WILDLIFE TASK GROUP
Database Version 8.1 (2005)

B163 Black-necked Stilt *Himantopus mexicanus*
Family: Recurvirostridae Order: Charadriiformes Class: Aves

Written by: M. Rigney
Reviewed by: L. Mewaldt
Edited by: R. Duke

DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A fairly common, yearlong resident, patchily distributed in the Central Valley and along the coast of California from San Francisco Bay south. It is found in estuarine, salt pond, lacustrine, and saline emergent wetland habitats, and locally in fresh emergent wetland and seasonally ponded wetlands. Winters regularly in the San Joaquin Valley, where it is locally common (McCaskie et al. 1979). Common to locally abundant in the same habitats April through September in southern California. Occurs year-round at the Salton Sea. Commonly breeds along lake shores in northeastern California and along the Colorado River (Garrett and Dunn 1981). Use of salt evaporation ponds has increased significantly since 1960; this now seems to be the primary wintering habitat (Cogswell 1979).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Forages in shallow water for insects, crustaceans, mollusks, other aquatic invertebrates, and some small fish. Prefers the shallows of lakeshores, flooded alkali flats, salt ponds, coastal estuaries, and flooded fields (Garrett and Dunn 1981). Gleans and probes for invertebrates from mud and shallow waters.

Cover: Rests and roosts on salt pond levees, dikes, alkali flats, islands in shallow water, and lake shores.

Reproduction: Requires open areas of friable soil, mudflats, levees, and dry lakeshores for nesting. These areas generally are located less than 1 km (0.6 mi) from a feeding area (Hamilton 1975). The nest is a shallow scrape in the ground, often lined with wetland plants, feathers of other birds, or cobble. Nest located on levees, islands, shorelines of lakes, and over water in heavy grass.

Water: No additional data found.

Pattern: No additional data found.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: A yearlong resident along the central and southern California coast, the San Joaquin Valley, and at the Salton Sea. Populations using Sierra Nevada and northeastern plateau lakes for breeding, migrate to lowland and coastal area in August and September.

Home Range: No data found.

Territory: Defends an "extensive" area around groups of nests. Several pairs may join in defense (Hamilton 1975). In his study of California populations, Hamilton (1975) found nests averaged 22 m (68 ft) apart, with a range of 2-42 m (6-130 ft).

Reproduction: Breeds from late April through August, with a peak in June (Bent 1927). Semicolonial; usually nests in loose groups near feeding areas (Hamilton 1975). Clutch size averages 4; range 3-5. Both adults incubate eggs, for 23-25 days. Young precocial (Harrison 1978); brooded on the nest site for up to 2 days after hatching, although capable of rapid movement, and can swim within 2 hr after hatching (Hamilton 1975)

Niche: Often nests very close to water; consequently, greatly affected by fluctuations in water levels of lakes or ponds. Many nests have been observed abandoned or submerged in salt ponds in the San Francisco Bay area as water levels are adjusted during salt production (Rigney and Rigney 1981).

REFERENCES

- Bent, A. C. 1927. Life histories of North American shorebirds. Part 1. U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 142. 420pp.
- Cogswell, H. L. 1977. Water birds of California. Univ. California Press, Berkeley. 399pp.
- Garrett, K., and J. Dunn. 1981. Birds of southern California. Los Angeles Audubon Soc. 408pp.
- Hamilton, R. B. 1975. Comparative behavior of the American avocet and the black-necked stilt (Recurvirostridae). Ornithol. Monogr. No. 17. 97pp.
- Harrison, C. 1978. A field guide to the nests, eggs and nestlings of North American birds. W. Collins Sons and Co., Cleveland OH. 416pp.
- Harrison, C. J. O., ed. 1978. Bird families of the world. Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York. 264pp.
- McCaskie, G., P. De Benedictis, R. Erickson, and J. Morlan. 1979. Birds of northern California, an annotated field list. 2nd ed. Golden Gate Audubon Soc., Berkeley. 84pp.
- Rigney, M., and T. Rigney. 1981. A breeding bird survey of the South San Francisco Bay salt pond levee system. U.S. Dep. Inter., Fish and Wildl. Serv., San Francisco Bay Natl. Wildl. Refuge Special Rep. 130pp.
- le to predators such as gulls and ravens.
- Hartwick (1974) listed gull predation as an important form of egg and chick mortality. Human and domestic animal disturbance on Farallon Islands apparently prevented oystercatchers from breeding between 1860 and the 1950s (Ainley and Lewis 1974). Recreational activity on or near rocky intertidal areas may prevent breeding. Oil spills can affect food supplies by fouling foraging habitats, but losses from direct oiling probably would be low. Storm waves destroy some nests.

REFERENCES

- Ainley, D. G., R. J. Boekelheide, T. J. Lewis, H. R. Huber, C. S. Strong, and S. H. Morrell. 1971-1980. Unpublished data on Farallon Islands. Point Reyes Bird Observatory, Stinson Beach, CA.
- Ainley, D. G., and T. J. Lewis. 1974. The history of Farallon Island marine bird populations, 1854-1972. Condor 76:432-446.
- Cogswell, H. L. 1977. Water birds of California. Univ. California Press, Berkeley. 399pp.
- Desante, D. F., and D. G. Ainley. 1980. The avifauna of the South Farallon Islands, California. Studies in Avian Biol. No. 4. Cooper Ornithol. Soc., Lawrence KA. 104pp.
- Garrett, K., and J. Dunn. 1981. Birds of southern California. Los Angeles Audubon Soc. 408pp.
- Harris, M. P. 1967. The biology of oystercatchers *Haematopus ostragalus* on Skokholm Island, South Wales. Ibis 109:180-193.
- Harrison, C. 1978. A field guide to the nests, eggs and nestlings of North American birds. W. Collins Sons and Co., Cleveland OH. 416pp.

- Harrison, C. J. O., ed. 1978. Bird families of the world. Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York. 264pp.
- Hartwick, E. B. 1974. Breeding ecology of the black oystercatcher *Haematopus bachmani* (Audubon). *Syesis* 7:83-92.
- Hunt, G. L., Jr., R. K. Pitman, M. Naughton, K. A. Winnett, A. Newman, P. R. Kelly, and K. T. Briggs. 1979. Distribution, status, reproductive ecology and foraging habits of breeding seabirds. Pages 1-399 in summary of marine mammal and seabird surveys of the Southern California Bight area, 1975-1978. U. S. Dep. Inter., Bur. Land Manage., Los Angeles. Publ. PB-81-248-205.
- Johnsgard, P. A. 1981. The plovers, sandpipers, and snipes of the world. Univ. Nebraska Press, Lincoln. 493pp.
- Morrell, S. H., H. R. Huber, T. J. Lewis, and D. G. Ainley. 1979. Feeding ecology of black oystercatchers on South Farallon Island, California. Pages 185-186 in F. A. Pitelka, ed. Shorebirds in marine environments. Studies in Avian Biol. No. 2. Cooper Ornithol. Soc., Lawrence, KA. 261pp.
- Palmer, R. S. 1967. Species accounts. Pages 143-267 in G. D. Stout, ed. The shorebirds of North America. Viking Press, New York. 270pp.
- Sowls, A. L., A. R. DeGange, J. W. Nelson, and G. S. Lester. 1980. Catalog of California seabird colonies. U.S. Dep. Inter., Fish and Wildl. Serv., Wash. DC. Biol. Serv. Program FWS/OBS-80/37. 371pp.
- Webster, J. D. 1941. Feeding habits of the black oystercatcher. *Condor* 43:175-180.